



### Searching for the Truth

Nancy Rivard always had a little different way of approaching things. As a child growing up in Troy, New York, and southern California, she wrote letters to God and literally let the wind take them. She dreamed of listening to sublime teachings of the Great Masters.

She graduated from SMU with a degree in Anthropology and then got her Master's in Public Administration. The future looked bright as she began climbing the corporate ladder as a flight attendant, then as a flight attendant supervisor for American Airlines.

But at the age of 29, on Christmas Eve in 1982, a traumatic event set in motion a chain of events that would change her life and the lives of many others. Her father, only 54 years old, died suddenly and unexpectedly.

Nancy began to question what her higher purpose in life really was, and what Truth and Reality meant -- questions to which she couldn't find answers.

In leadership we know that sometimes to go forward, we must be willing to temporarily go backwards. In this pursuit, sacrifices of time, money, prestige, and profits sometimes have to be made. Maybe an even bigger pressure is the ridicule of family and friends who don't understand our passions.

Tiger Woods, for example, in the middle of a great golfing career, decided that for him to move forward, he had to reinvent his swing. He went for almost two years without winning a tournament and was scorned by fans and golf experts for fixing something that wasn't broken. Some said he was a has-been who would never again rule the world of golf. But when he got it right, he came back to golf and has dominated the sport ever since. Currently, he has won six tournaments in a row -- including two majors.

Now, back to Nancy's story. Nancy took a demotion from management back to flight attendant so that she'd have more time and flexibility for her seven-year quest to get her questions answered.

It might be interesting at this point to ask: how would you react if your daughter or son came to you and said, "Mom, Dad, I want to take a demotion, thereby ending for all practical purposes my business career, and fly all over the world for seven years to search for the Truth and find my inner Light. I need time to meditate."

As a leader, how would you react to that hard-charging, 29-year-old Master's graduate on the fast track saying, "I don't want to be a manager anymore? I just want to be a worker bee so I can go live with the Hopi Indians, and the Indians in the Andes of Peru. I want to adopt a child in Sri Lanka, have psychic surgery (what?) in the Philippines, and watch materializations (what?) in India, New Mexico, and Tennessee." (I will have to admit seeing some miracles myself from some folks from Tennessee last Saturday night in Williams-Brice Stadium!)

Nancy did all this and a whole lot more. In her travels she experienced the inequities in the developing world, the deprivation and starvation, where just getting a drink of fresh water is impossible. She thought about the abundance, indeed, the opulence, of our lifestyles, and she began to connect some dots: travel industry....people in need....people who care, and who have time, and who are willing to contribute. Her idea was simple, yet profound: flight attendants who can travel easily and cheaply

could be a force for good.

In March of 1993, after trying to enlist the support of her company and other flight attendants to no avail, she became discouraged and somewhat at a loss about how to proceed. How could she, just a flight attendant, make a difference? Her inner voice responded, "Just do it. Bring one jacket to one orphan, volunteer your time to bring food to the hungry, blankets to the cold. Just begin!" She decided to make the first flight herself, alone. In April of that year, two flight attendants joined her in taking soaps, shampoos and hotel amenities, collected from layovers, to Bosnian refugees. In May she flew to Guatemala to escort two-year-old Maria Jose to the United States for heart surgery.

Thus was born Airline Ambassadors. Today it has more than 6,000 volunteer members who have **personally** delivered over \$34 million worth of needed food, clothing, medical supplies -- and love-- to needy people in 44 countries, not to mention here at home after disasters like Hurricane Katrina. For every dollar donated, these big-hearted ambassadors deliver \$45 in humanitarian aid. Only 2% of their donations go to administrative costs.

**Nancy Rivard has received:**

The Woman of the Year Award  
Ambassador of Peace Award  
Paul Harris Fellowship from Rotary International  
National Caring Award  
Presidential Volunteer Service Award

**The Leadership Challenge:**

How can we connect the dots: our talents...our passions....our time....someone's need? Is there some creative way we can give back? We don't need to travel all over the world. There are plenty of opportunities right here, right down the street. We get so busy (here comes my own personal guilt-trip-and-confession-is-good-for-the-soul-thing) making a living, accumulating, vacationing and ball gaming that we (I) forget how lucky we are to be living in a world of abundance, and that there are lots of opportunities to help the less fortunate. Nancy came to understand that the extraordinary lies in the ordinary, that joy comes in service, and that the potential of love resides in each action, every moment.

**Maybe it's time to "Just Do It!"**

More information can be found about Airline Ambassadors at: <http://airlineambassadors.com>.



I encourage your response to these thoughts. [farlgroup@aol.com](mailto:farlgroup@aol.com)

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